



MAINE Environment

2024 Legislative Priorities for Maine's Environment

From the Desk of Our CEO



When we look back at this winter, we'll remember a season of historic storms that flooded our towns, swept away roads, and wreaked devastation on working waterfronts and oceanside homes.

Photos of the devastation splashed across TV screens and social media were heart-wrenching—and should be enough to strengthen anyone's resolve to make curbing climate change a high priority.

But unfortunately, we can't count on that. So, as the effects of a changing climate become tangible for us in Maine, can we count on you?

You can make a difference for our land, air, waters, and wildlife by contacting your elected officials about issues that matter to you.

Our 2024 priorities for the legislative session include measures to both address climate change and help communities prepare for its inevitable impacts. This is your chance to advocate for tribal sovereignty,

speaking up for Maine's North Woods and the 140 rare plants and animals that live there, and take action on a range of other issues critical for Maine's future.

Contacting your elected officials at opportune moments will be key. Legislators say that the voices of their constituents are the most important ones they need to hear. Count on our staff experts to be at the State House laying the groundwork for your phone call or email to your decision-maker. We'll be sure to let you know when the best time is to contact them.

Decades of inaction by elected officials have led us to this moment in history where climate change impacts can be utterly devastating. Maine has taken some important steps and is setting an example for the rest of the nation. NRCM is proud to have been part of that work. We must keep it going, in the Legislature and beyond. Thank you for joining us.

This year's legislative session got off to a quick start in early January, with lawmakers determined to complete action by the third week of April. This is the so-called "emergency" or "short" session (January – April), which followed last year's "regular" or "long" session (January – July). With more than 500 bills to consider, legislators have a lot of work to do, which will likely involve many long days and nights as they race toward adjournment.

NRCM is tracking more than 60 bills at the State House. By the end of January, our policy experts had already testified on more than two dozen of them. As I write this, I'm pleased to report that several bills that will benefit Maine's environment are moving forward and a few that would weaken existing environmental protections are heading toward defeat. Stopping rollback bills is one of our top priorities, always.

Overall, we are cautiously optimistic that this will be another good year for new laws that protect Maine's environment and communities. Still, our expectations are modest for several reasons, and not simply because it is more difficult to pass big, new policy proposals during the short session.

One limiting factor, ironically, is all the progress we've made over the past five years. This has been one of the most successful periods in decades for passing legislation that benefits Maine's environment. Lawmakers have enacted more than 100 bills and spending measures since 2019 that will have positive impacts on climate action and strengthen environmental protections. This includes big wins for offshore wind power; reforming Maine's Bottle Bill; funding for land conservation, state parks, and climate resiliency measures; and laws to protect wildlife habitat, reduce plastic pollution, and much more. With these victories, state agencies are stretched thin as they implement new statutory responsibilities and are reticent to take on more.

Election year dynamics also could impact our work at the State House, with increased partisanship and emotionally charged debates on "hot button" issues potentially impacting unrelated topics.

Competition for funding will also be a factor. Even with a budget surplus, lawmakers will be jockeying all session long over how to allocate funds in the supplemental budget.

Despite these factors, we are determined to win on as many bills as possible, and we will – because we'll mobilize people like you to help us achieve great things. We've also built effective partnerships with lawmakers and coalition allies, and as always NRCM staff will be laser focused on achieving continued progress for Maine's environment.

One of our top priorities will be to pass the Maine Trails Bond, which would be the first-ever significant investment in trails used for hiking, biking, skiing, active transportation, snowmobiling, off-road vehicles, and all manner of other uses.

We're working to curb the expansion of utility gas lines beyond existing service districts and prevent gas utilities from subsidizing such expansions on the backs of ratepayers. These are sensible steps given the imperative of reducing our dependence on fossil fuels.

We also are strongly supporting legislation to recognize the sovereignty of tribes in Maine, a long-overdue change in Maine law that could help address the state's tragic history in relation to the people who have inhabited these lands for time immemorial.

NRCM is closely coordinating our efforts with 34 organizations that participate in Maine's Environmental Priorities Coalition. We also are working in partnership with business owners, young Mainers, municipal officials, policy experts, Maine people statewide, and you—our members and supporters. You provide us with the inspiration and people power that help us win.

We greatly appreciate your help, support, and participation in our work. If you are interested in becoming more involved in the policy process, then please contact us. We are here to help. If you have not already done so, please sign up for NRCM email updates at the Take Action page at nrcm.org. You'll learn about progress on legislative priorities and find out when and how you can help make a difference. Also, please visit our social media accounts or website throughout the legislative session for further updates.

As always, thank you for your support. —Pete Didisheim, Senior Director of Advocacy



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Invest in Maine Trails Statewide



Snowmobiling on a trail in Maine's North Woods, by Andy Gagne

Maine has the potential to be a top-tier state in the nation with trails for hiking, biking, active transportation, skiing, snowmobiling, and many other uses, but only if we invest in the design, construction, and maintenance of our trails.

In literally every corner of the state, Maine trails serve as a critical resource for connecting Maine people and visitors with the natural world, and for reaching destinations to work and play. During the pandemic, more people than ever discovered the adventures and rejuvenation Maine trails provide. Our vast variety of trails are a key feature in Maine's \$3.3 billion outdoor recreation economy, which supports 32,000 jobs. Snowmobiling alone generates more than \$600 million in Maine and supports 2,200 jobs.

Despite the importance of trails to Maine, the state invests essentially nothing in the development and maintenance of trails. Small amounts of federal and private funding help support trail construction and maintenance projects, but these sources are grossly insufficient to meet the demand. Although ATV and snowmobile clubs receive funding from vehicle registrations and the gas tax, these funds also fall far short of the need.

Trail groups, land trusts, and communities statewide have identified a large backlog of maintenance projects that need attention, including responding to damage caused by the December and January storms. Funding also is needed to build trails that are accessible to individuals with mobility challenges, and for commuting and active transportation.

To improve the quality and expand the network of Maine trails, Representative Jessica Fay (D-Raymond) last year introduced the Maine Trails Bond (LD 1156) that would provide \$30 million in grants over a 4-year period for non-motorized, motorized, and multi-use trails. The Bureau of Parks and Lands would manage the funding, which would support the design, construction, and maintenance of trails. More than 500 organizations, businesses, and towns statewide have endorsed the Maine Trails Bond.

Status: LD 1156 was carried over from last year. It will need a two-thirds vote in the House and Senate to send it to the November ballot.

Action Needed: Contact your State Representative and Senator and urge them to support the Maine Trails Bond (LD 1156).

Recognize Tribal Sovereignty

Over the past several years, lawmakers have considered multiple bills that would recognize the inherent sovereignty rights of tribes in Maine by implementing consensus recommendations of the 2019 Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act.

This year, House Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross (D-Portland) will introduce a bill (LD 2007) that has the strong support of the Wabanaki Alliance, which includes the Mi'kmaq Nation, Houlton Band

of Maliseet Indians, Passamaquoddy Tribe, and Penobscot Nation.

NRCM supports the tribal sovereignty bill and is advocating for its passage, along with countless other organizations and individuals. Hundreds of Maine people have submitted testimony in support of tribal sovereignty legislation. We anticipate the same happening again in support of LD 2007.

We all depend on a clean, healthy environment and are united by our love for the Maine outdoors. We must use this unity to ensure equity and fairness for all. It's this obligation to making the outdoors more equitable, and the recognition of past injustices toward Wabanaki tribes, that is motivating NRCM's support for tribal sovereignty.

Status: A public hearing on LD 2007 is expected in late February or early March.

Action Needed: Contact your Representative and Senator to urge their support for tribal sovereignty.

Limit Natural Gas Expansion

Climate change is causing serious impacts to Maine and the planet. Not only was 2023 the hottest year ever recorded, but we also experienced catastrophic storms in December and January that stand as dangerous reminders of the escalating risks if we fail to act boldly and urgently to the unfolding climate crisis.

Although Maine has taken significant actions to address climate change, including setting ambitious emissions-reduction requirements and clean energy goals, continued actions are necessary to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and accelerate the transition to clean energy and resilient communities.

At a time when Maine is seeking to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050, we should not be subsidizing the expansion of Maine's gas distribution pipelines—which have a 50-year average economic life. That's why NRCM is working with the Office of the Public Advocate and other allies to support a bill (LD 2077) that would curb open-ended expansions of natural gas and scrutinize the operations of gas utilities.

The bill would end existing subsidies for adding new customers to the gas system; prevent utilities from expanding into new municipalities; study geothermal energy as a potential transition for the gas utility workforce and existing infrastructure; and study the indoor air quality and health impacts of burning fossil fuels inside residences and commercial buildings.

LD 2077 would help prevent an increase in methane emissions, which are the major component of natural gas and a climate super-pollutant, with more than 80 times the warming power of carbon dioxide over the first 20 years after it reaches the atmosphere. The goal of this bill is consistent with studies that recommend the managed phase-out of fossil fuel infrastructure at all scales to help avoid catastrophic impacts from climate change.

Status: The Energy, Utilities and Technology Committee held a hearing on LD 2077 in late January. It appears likely that the bill will be scaled back through amendments that require studies be done on the broad range of issues associated with natural gas.



NRCM File



Forested landscape along Square Lake Township, Aroostook County

Increase Stakeholder Input for Maine's Forestry Policy

Maine's 17.5 million acres of forests are a critical resource for our state's economy, for the timber industry, for a broad range of recreation activities, and for the plants, fish, and wildlife in the woods and waters of Maine.

Nearly 140 rare plants and animals live in Maine's forestlands, including 21 globally rare species. Maine's forests represent the largest Globally Important Bird Area in the United States, supporting millions of songbirds, including a high proportion of the world's population of Black-throated Blue Warblers. Because of the vast scale of Maine's largely unfragmented forests, these lands play a significant role in mitigating and adapting to climate change and ensuring continued biodiversity—two of the most pressing issues facing the world today.

Despite the clear value of Maine's forests to the state, decisions about the management of this resource largely are made without broad input from diverse stakeholders.

With this concern in mind, Representative Maggie O'Neal (D-Saco) last year introduced a bill (LD 993) to create a Forest Advisory Board, similar to advisory boards that exist in at least 15 other states, including New Hampshire. This board would bring together a variety of viewpoints to share information, facilitate public input, look at the forest comprehensively, and advise the Maine Forest Service on policies to keep our forests healthy, intact, and productive.

Status: LD 993 passed the House and Senate during 2023 but did not receive final approval for the \$5,130 needed to fund the operations of the Board annually.

Action Needed: Urge your elected representatives to support funding the Forest Advisory Board (LD 993) as part of the supplemental budget.

NRCM File



Truth in Labeling about Recycling

Plastic pollution poses a threat to the environment, wildlife, and public health. Only about 9% of plastics are recycled, and large volumes of plastic end up in the ocean, where they harm marine life.

In recent years, Maine lawmakers have made important gains in tackling the problem of plastic pollution through a ban on single-use plastic bags and foam food containers. In addition, passage of the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for Packaging law will encourage large corporations to design more environmentally responsible packaging materials.

However, eliminating unnecessary uses of plastic requires implementing a broad range of measures that will increase recycling of it to the maximum extent possible. One such measure should be a requirement that products provide accurate information about whether they are truly recyclable. Today, companies intentionally deceive and confuse consumers by placing the chasing arrows symbol on products that those companies know will not and cannot be recycled into another product.

Representative Lori Gramlich (D-Old Orchard Beach) introduced an amended version of LD 295—a “truth in labeling” bill—to help address this problem. Starting January 1, 2027, the bill would prohibit the distribution or sale in Maine of any plastic container or plastic packaging that includes a deceptive or misleading claim about its recyclability.

False claims about recyclability cause consumers to think that they can put non-recyclable items into recycling bins where they don’t belong. This degrades the quality of all recycled plastic, leading to more landfilling and more plastic pollution, which has impacts on the environment and the taxpayers who pay for solid waste management.

LD 295 would require manufacturers to tell the truth about the recyclability of plastic products. Companies that are already using accurate labeling would not be impacted, but those who are spreading false information would need to stop doing so. This could be an incentive for them to shift to packaging that truly can be recycled.

Status: A public hearing on LD 295 was held in January, and lawmakers are now considering amendments to the bill.

Action: Contact your elected representatives to urge their support for LD 295 to help ensure that the chasing arrows recycling label is not placed on products that cannot be recycled.

Our Experts Are Working for You on Maine’s Environmental Legislation

NRCM’s knowledge of the issues you care about runs deep. Right now, our team of issue experts is working hard for you at the Maine State Legislature and beyond. Learn more about our team at nrcm.org.



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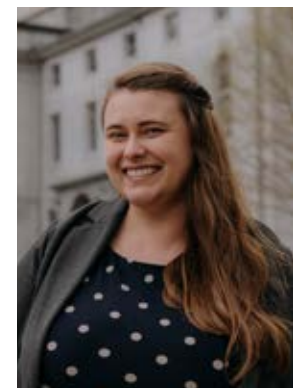
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Other Important Issues NRCM is Tracking

Below are a few additional bills that will receive significant attention from our staff experts this session.

Preparing for Climate Impacts

Governor Mills has proposed a \$50 million fund to help Maine communities build and upgrade infrastructure (including roads, culverts, working waterfronts, and storm water systems) that would be resilient in the face of climate change. The recent storms demonstrated the urgency of such funding. She also has proposed adding \$5 million to the Community Resilience Partnership program, which supports projects by cities, towns, and tribal governments to reduce climate impacts and make their communities more resilient. The program has supported 175



Augusta, Allison Wells

cities, towns, and tribal governments to date, and this new funding would allow another 100 across Maine to participate.

Promoting Reusable Containers NRCM strongly supports a bill (LD 2091) introduced by Senator Nicole Grohoski (D-Hancock) that would allow businesses to provide food in reusable containers and be able to receive them back to sanitize and reuse. Current state policy and guidance prevents businesses from adopting reuse strategies.

Creating Maine Office of Civic Affairs Last year, the Legislature passed a bill (LD 1934) sponsored by Representative Melanie Sachs (D-Freeport) to study options for restructuring state agency programs to provide more efficient and

integrated support and technical assistance to communities. As a result of that bill, the Governor will propose creating a new Maine Office of Civic Affairs, which will bring together planning and technical support staff from multiple agencies, including the Municipal Planning Assistance Program, Maine Coastal Program, Community Resilience Partnership, and other entities. NRCM strongly supports this new office, which will be created as part of the budget.

Protecting Lake Water Quality

Senator Tim Nangle (D-Cumberland) introduced a bill (LD 2101) in response to major shoreland zone violations where wealthy homeowners have used litigation as a tool to avoid complying with this critical lake water quality law. The bill allows a town to claim a lien against a property and revoke permits issued for work in the shoreland zone. The bill will protect towns and lakes from homeowners who ignore Maine law and use their wealth to block enforcement.



Winthrop, Allison Wells

Advancing Environmental Justice Last year, the Legislature passed (but did not fund) a bill (LD 1621) that would require the Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to provide meaningful and equitable involvement of historically marginalized and underserved communities in DEP policy development,

continued on page 4

Other Important Issues - from Page 3

regulations, and decision-making. The bill was carried over to this legislative session and requires about \$500,000 annually, which will need to be included in the supplemental budget to go into effect.



Promoting Medium- and Heavy-duty Electric Vehicles The Legislature is on track to pass a bill (LD 122), introduced by Senator Henry Ingwerson (D-York), to create a pilot program to encourage adoption of medium- and heavy-duty electric vehicles (MHDEVs) by Maine businesses. Efficiency Maine would discount the upfront cost of MHDEVs through rebates, vouchers, or other financial incentives, and gather data on the use and efficacy of those vehicles in commercial settings over the next two years. This information could create a basis for expansion of the program.

Stopping Industrial Rockweed Harvesting Early in the session, lawmakers on the Marine Resources Committee voted unanimously to defeat a bill (LD 2003) that would have opened Maine's coastlines to unrestricted harvesting of rockweed—a key ecological resource used as habitat by more than 100 marine species. Stopping industrial rockweed harvesting has been an NRCM priority in recent years, so we were pleased to support this decision.

Blocking Nuclear Industry Public Relations The Nuclear Energy Institute last year worked with Representative Reagan Paul (R-Winterport) to introduce a bill (LD 1549) to promote the development of so-called “small modular nuclear reactors.” The bill is part of a nationwide public relations campaign to create the impression that states are interested in helping revive the nuclear power industry. But nuclear power remains the most expensive energy source on the planet, and the industry has not yet solved the vexing problem of how to safely store radioactive waste for up to millions of years. Unless that changes, Maine should not be used by the nuclear industry in a campaign aimed at Wall Street. The Legislature should defeat LD 1549.



Together, we stopped Wolfden Resources' proposal for a polluting mine in the Katahdin region. Visit nrcm.org to watch our latest video showcasing this collective victory and our work together to build the future we want for Maine — a future with clean air, clean water, and healthy communities.

Bookmark Our Legislative Bill Tracking Page

Our Legislative Bill Tracking page on our website provides links to our priority legislation, information on NRCM's position on the issues, links to factsheets and NRCM testimony, and updates on the status of the bills.

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Frontline Voices
podcast



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Tips for Citizen Engagement

Maine's environmental laws exist because of the work and involvement of people like you. Our goal is to encourage as many people as possible to participate in the process. Every action can help make a difference, from sending an email or making a phone call to your elected officials to writing a letter-to-the-editor or testifying at a hearing.

NRCM has created a Take Action Toolkit on our website with resources to help you participate in the legislative process. Visit nrcm.org/get-involved/take-action for the following resources:

- How to find your Maine state legislators
- Tips for contacting your legislators
- Video on how to testify via Zoom
- Video on how to write and deliver testimony
- Tips on writing a letter-to-the-editor



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